Welcoming the Stranger

> *"When the people of Israel leave their homes and enter the sukkah for the sake of God's name, they merit to welcome the Divine Presence there, and all the seven shepherds descend from Gan Eden and come to the sukkah as their guests." (Zohar, Emor 103a)*

The Zohar teaches us that the sukkah contains such an intense concentration of spiritual energy that it becomes a worldly paradise, providing a holy space for the indwelling of our ancestors The seven exalted guests (*ushpizin),* who were traditionally invited into our sukkot, were: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. Today, we also invite into our sukkot seven female leaders of Israel: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, and Esther. As we invite these traditional, spiritual guests, we are reminded of the importance of inviting others into our sukkot. The mitzvah of *hachnasat orchim,* the **welcoming of guests**, extends to all those groups, friends and strangers, who we invite to share the bounty of our sukkah. Symbolically, we might invite all those who inspire us to strive for holiness; practically, we might invite all those in need to partake of our hospitality.